

Words Matter

Terms Used Incorrectly Can Cause Confusion

CAPTAIN MICHAEL DANE ACORD

*I*t's 0300. You, the platoon leader, are conducting a patrol when "BOOM!" An improvised explosive device (IED) has just exploded, followed by a direct fire contact from the building in front of you. The lead squad lays down a base of fire while the trail two squads bound. There is a lot of noise and firing. Additionally, the members of the lead squad in contact can't hear well due to the explosion. You move with the assault element. As you approach the objective, you radio the base of fire squad leader and ask him to "shift" fire. The squad leader yells, "shift fire," but due to the noise of battle and the pain of damaged eardrums, several members of his squad mistake this for "lift fire," the prearranged signal to stop firing. As a result, two members of the assault element are killed.

What went wrong? What was their alternate signal? Did the base of fire confirm the signal? Could they see? Were they receiving effective fire? In my Infantry Captains Career Course (ICCC) Small Group, I would ask another question. Why did the platoon leader use "lift fire" versus "cease fire?" You might ask, why does that matter? Isn't that SOP? It may well be unit SOP, but it isn't doctrinally accurate.

Words matter.

About every three years, we discuss the topic of "lift and shift fires." It has come to our attention, and we believe it is necessary to highlight some key definitions in our doctrine to clear up some fairly ingrained misconceptions in our doctrine.

Capstone doctrine, such as Field Manual (FM) 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Symbols*, provides common language for all Army forces to use. As long as these terms are used correctly, there are few problems. However, when these terms are used incorrectly, or worse, when we don't know we are using the terms incorrectly, we run into problems.

Consider this story:

When dealing with someone who doesn't speak your language, you know immediately that there is a communication problem. But, a far worse situation is when you think you know what someone is saying, but they have a different meaning for their words. For example, my coworker's wife is British. She asks him to check under the "bonnet" and look in the "boot." When he starts to take off her hat and boots, she gets angry. When you inquire as to her embitterment, she says "on the car you idiot!" In Great Britain, the "bonnet" is a car hood, and the "boot" is the trunk. As you can see, it is far worse to have a communication problem and not know it.

Words matter.

Cease fire is the correct term to use instead of lift fire. Shift, lift, and cease fire are defined in FM 101-5-1. FM 101-5-1 defines these terms in the following manner:

Lift fire — In direct fire, the command to raise the cone of fire so that the beaten zone strikes the target, but the space between the target and the firing weapons is safe for maneuver by friendly forces. See FMs 17-12 and 23-1.

Shift fire — The command to move the cone of fire in a direction away from a friendly maneuvering force so that enemy forces continue to be struck by the beaten zone at the same time the friendly unit moves. See FMs 6-series, 7-90, 7-91, 17-12, and 23-1.

Cease fire (JP 1-02) — A command given to air defense artillery units to refrain from firing on, but to continue to track, an airborne object. Missiles already in flight will be permitted to continue to intercept. (Army) A command

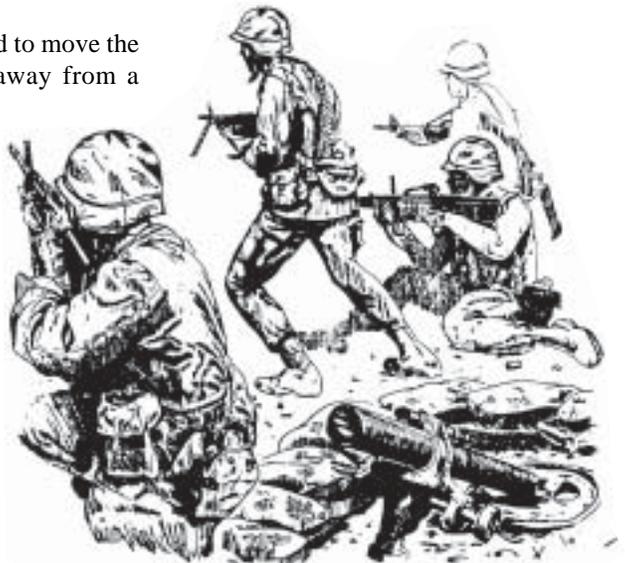
given to any unit or individual firing any weapon to stop engaging the target. (See also call for fire, fire command, and fire mission.) See FMs 6-20, 7-8, 7-90, 17-12, 23-1, and 44-100.

You might say, FM 101-5-1 is a "higher" manual and doesn't apply to me. Let's look then at how FM 7-8 describes them:

STEP 4. Attack. (From FM 7-8 dtd. 1992 page 4-9.)

If the squad(s) in contact together with the machine gun(s) can suppress the enemy, the platoon leader determines if the remaining squad(s) not in contact can maneuver. He assesses the following:

- Location of enemy positions and obstacles;
- Size of enemy force engaging the squad; (The number of enemy automatic weapons, the presence of any vehicles, and the employment of indirect fires are indicators of enemy strength.)
- Vulnerable flank; and
- Covered and concealed flanking route to the enemy position.
 - a. If the answer is **YES** (he can



maneuver), the platoon leader maneuvers the squad(s) into the assault:

(1) Once the platoon leader has ensured that the base-of-fire element is in position and providing suppressive fires, he leads the assaulting squad(s) to the assault position.

(2) Once in position, the platoon leader gives the prearranged signal for the base-of-fire element to lift or shift direct fires to the opposite flank of the enemy position.

FM 7-8 uses both terms with “or” separating them. To me, this means that leaders can choose to continue to engage targets in a safe manner beyond the objective I see “lift fires” having application primarily in urban fire control.

The confusion stems from Training Circular (TC) 7-9. Unfortunately, FM 101-5-1 is the proponent for those terms and is what is correct, regardless of what we may have learned incorrectly. A training circular is not authoritative.

6-2. OBJECTIVES (From TC 7-9 [mistake])

Platoon training has many objectives. These include:

- Reinforcement of principles of command and control.

- Reinforcement of concepts of supporting fire, base of fire, and synchronization of fires.

- Reinforcement of concepts of starting, stopping, and lifting and shifting fires. (Everyone must know [through training and rehearsals] the signal for lift or shift. Lift simply means to cease fire. Shifting is more complex. It can mean shifting from one section of the objective to an adjacent section, or it can denote a total shift from the objective to an adjacent area. Additional coordination and a timed sequence of events [matrix] can apply in certain missions such as a deliberate attack.)

- Concentration on maneuver (to include security), fire control measures, and fire discipline.

You might say, this is semantics and not important. Let’s look at some more practical reasons. “Shift” sounds a lot like “lift” and could be confusing during noisy combat operations. In training, we use “cease” fire on the range. Therefore, it makes sense to use what every Soldier uses from the beginning of his career to the end.

Our doctrine establishes the standards for our training. If we allow our doctrine to become irrelevant, then our training and future combat capabilities will degrade. We have a responsibility as combined arms leaders to use doctrinal rigor in our training. Without these standards, our training will become less effective.

At the time the article was written, **Captain Michael Dane Acord** was serving as small group instructor for the Infantry Captains Career Course at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Why Organic Fires?

COLONEL ROBERT F. BARRY II

Editor’s Note: *This article first appeared in the March-June 2004 issue of Field Artillery magazine.*

The Army’s purpose is to fight and win the nation’s wars, according to the “Army Strategic Planning Guidance 2006-2023.” As the source of trained and ready land forces of decisive action across the spectrum of conflict, the Army provides the joint force commander (JFC) the ability to coerce enemies, control resources and populations, and decisively conclude conflicts on terms and a timeline favorable to U.S. national interests.

If we believe war is an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will, then to win our nation’s wars, we must leave the enemy no choice but to accede to our demands. By persistent close combat and, if necessary, occupation of the enemy’s territory and key facilities, ground forces compel him to accede.

The enemy must face a persistent state of disadvantage, and friendly ground forces must be able to escalate the disadvantages of his continued resistance *quickly*. Responsive, adjustable, scalable and precise fire support is a key enabler in creating persistent disadvantage. These adjectives describe fires organic to the ground force.

Joint Publication 1-02 DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms defines “organic” as “assigned to and forming an essential part of a military organization.” Building on that definition, for purposes of this article, “organic” refers to maintaining a balance of indirect fires assets



U.S. Army photo

When ground forces are in close combat, responsiveness will never be irrelevant — and the most responsive fires, today and in the future will remain those organic to the force.